BOOK THE SEVENTH. THE VANISHING HOPES

CHAPTER 1

Two days later, Amelius moved into his cottage.

He had provided himself with a new servant, as easily as he had provided himself with a new abode. A foreign waiter at the hotel--a gray-haired Frenchman of the old school, reputed to be the most ill-tempered servant in the house--had felt the genial influence of Amelius with the receptive readiness of his race. Here was a young Englishman, who spoke to him as easily and pleasantly as if he was speaking to a friend--who heard him relate his little grievances, and never took advantage of that circumstance to turn him into ridicule--who said kindly, "I hope you don't mind my calling you by your nickname," when he ventured to explain that his Christian name was "Theophile," and that his English fellow servants had facetiously altered and shortened it to "Toff," to suit their insular convenience. "For the first time, sir," he had hastened to add, "I feel it an honour to be Toff, when you speak to me." Asking everybody whom he met if they could recommend a servant to him, Amelius had put the question, when Toff came in one morning with the hot water. The old Frenchman made a low bow, expressive of devotion. "I know of but one man, sir, whom I can safely recommend," he answered--"take me." Amelius was delighted; he had only one objection to make. "I don't want to keep two servants," he said, while Toff was helping him on with his dressing-gown. "Why should you keep two servants, sir?" the Frenchman inquired. Amelius answered, "I can't ask you to make the beds." "Why not?" said Toff--and made the bed, then and there, in five minutes. He ran out of the room, and came back with one of the chambermaid's brooms. "Judge for yourself, sir--can I sweep a carpet?" He placed a chair for Amelius. "Permit me to save you the trouble of shaving yourself. Are you satisfied? Very good. I am equally capable of cutting your hair, and attending to your corns (if you suffer, sir, from that inconvenience). Will you allow me to propose something which you have not had yet for your breakfast?" In half an hour more, he brought in the new dish. "Oeufs a la Tripe. An elementary specimen, sir, of what I can do for you as a cook. Be pleased to taste it." Amelius ate it all up on the spot; and Toff applied the moral, with the neatest choice of language. "Thank you, sir, for a gratifying

expression of approval. One more specimen of my poor capabilities, and I have done. It is barely possible--God forbid!--that you may fall ill. Honour me by reading that document." He handed a written paper to Amelius, dated some years since in Paris, and signed in an English name. "I testify with gratitude and pleasure that Theophile Leblond has nursed me through a long illness, with an intelligence and devotion which I cannot too highly praise." "May you never employ me, sir, in that capacity," said Toff. "I have only to add that I am not so old as I look, and that my political opinions have changed, in later life, from red-republican to moderate-liberal. I also confess, if necessary, that I still have an ardent admiration for the fair sex." He laid his hand on his heart, and waited to be engaged.

So the household at the cottage was modestly limited to Amelius and Toff.

Rufus remained for another week in London, to watch the new experiment. He had made careful inquiries into the Frenchman's character, and had found that the complaints of his temper really amounted to this--that "he gave himself the airs of a gentleman, and didn't understand a joke." On the question of honesty and sobriety, the testimony of the proprietor of the hotel left Rufus nothing to desire. Greatly to his surprise, Amelius showed no disposition to grow weary of his quiet life, or to take refuge in perilous amusements from the sober society of his books. He was regular in his inquiries at Mr. Farnaby's house; he took long walks by himself; he never mentioned Sally's name; he lost his interest in going to the theatre, and he never appeared in the smoking-room of the club. Some men, observing the remarkable change which had passed over his excitable temperament, would have hailed it as a good sign for the future. The New Englander looked below the surface, and was not so easily deceived. "My bright boy's soul is discouraged and cast down," was the conclusion that he drew. "There's darkness in him where there once was light; and, what's worse than all, he caves in, and keeps it to himself." After vainly trying to induce Amelius to open his heart, Rufus at last went to Paris, with a mind that was ill at ease.

On the day of the American's departure, the march of events was resumed; and the unnaturally quiet life of Amelius began to be disturbed again.

Making his customary inquiries in the forenoon at Mr. Farnaby's door, he found the household in a state of agitation. A second council of physicians had been held, in consequence of the appearance of some alarming symptoms in the case of the patient. On this occasion, the medical men told him plainly that he would sacrifice his life to his obstinacy, if he persisted in remaining in London and returning to his business. By good fortune, the

affairs of the bank had greatly benefited, through the powerful interposition of Mr. Melton. With the improved prospects, Mr. Farnaby (at his niece's entreaty) submitted to the doctor's advice. He was to start on the first stage of his journey the next morning; and, at his own earnest desire, Regina was to go with him. "I hate strangers and foreigners; and I don't like being alone. If you don't go with me, I shall stay where I am--and die." So Mr. Farnaby put it to his adopted daughter, in his rasping voice and with his hard frown.

"I am grieved, dear Amelius, to go away from you," Regina said; "but what can I do? It would have been so nice if you could have gone with us. I did hint something of the sort; but--"

Her downcast face finished the sentence. Amelius felt the bare idea of being Mr. Farnaby's travelling companion make his blood run cold. And Mr. Farnaby, on his side, reciprocated the sentiment. "I will write constantly, dear," Regina resumed; "and you will write back, won't you? Say you love me; and promise to come tomorrow morning, before we go."

She kissed him affectionately--and, the instant after, checked the responsive outburst of tenderness in Amelius, by that utter want of tact which (in spite of the popular delusion to the contrary) is so much more common in women than in men, "My uncle is so particular about packing his linen," she said; "nobody can please him but me; I must ask you to let me run upstairs again."

Amelius went out into the street, with his head down and his lips fast closed. He was not far from Mrs. Payson's house. "Why shouldn't I call?" he thought to himself. His conscience added, "And hear some news of Sally."

There was good news. The girl was brightening mentally and physically--she was in a fair way, if she only remained in the Home, to be "Simple" Sally no longer. Amelius asked if she had got the photograph of the cottage. Mrs. Payson laughed. "Sleeps with it under her pillow, poor child," she said, "and looks at it fifty times a day." Thirty years since, with infinitely less experience to guide her, the worthy matron would have followed her instincts, and would have hesitated to tell Amelius quite so much about the photograph. But some of a woman's finer sensibilities do get blunted with the advance of age and the accumulation of wisdom.

Instead of pursuing the subject of Sally's progress, Amelius, to Mrs. Payson's surprise, made a clumsy excuse, and abruptly took his leave.

He felt the need of being alone; he was conscious of a vague distrust of

himself, which degraded him in his own estimation. Was he, like characters he had read of in books, the victim of a fatality? The slightest circumstances conspired to heighten his interest in Sally--just at the time when Regina had once more disappointed him. He was as firmly convinced, as if he had been the strictest moralist living, that it was an insult to Regina, and an insult to his own self-respect, to set the lost creature whom he had rescued in any light of comparison with the young lady who was one day to be his wife. And yet, try as he might to drive her out, Sally kept her place in his thoughts. There was, apparently, some innate depravity in him. If a looking-glass had been handed to him at that moment, he would have been ashamed to look himself in the face.

After walking until he was weary, he went to his club.

The porter gave him a letter as he crossed the hall. Mrs. Farnaby had kept her promise, and had written to him. The smoking-room was deserted at that time of day. He opened his letter in solitude, looked at it, crumpled it up impatiently, and put it into his pocket. Not even Mrs. Farnaby could interest him at that critical moment. His own affairs absorbed him. The one idea in his mind, after what he had heard about Sally, was the idea of making a last effort to hasten the date of his marriage before Mr. Farnaby left England. "If I can only feel sure of Regina--"

His thoughts went no further than that. He walked up and down the empty smoking-room, anxious and irritable, dissatisfied with himself, despairing of the future. "I can but try it!" he suddenly decided--and turned at once to the table to write a letter.

Death had been busy with the members of his family in the long interval that had passed since he and his father left England. His nearest surviving relative was his uncle--his father's younger brother--who occupied a post of high importance in the Foreign Office. To this gentleman he now wrote, announcing his arrival in England, and his anxiety to qualify himself for employment in a Government office. "Be so good as to grant me an interview," he concluded; "and I hope to satisfy you that I am not unworthy of your kindness, if you will exert your influence in my favour."

He sent away his letter at once by a private messenger, with instructions to wait for an answer.

It was not without doubt, and even pain, that he had opened communication with a man whose harsh treatment of his father it was impossible for him to forget. What could the son expect? There was but one

hope. Time might have inclined the younger brother to make atonement to the memory of the elder, by a favourable reception of his nephew's request.

His father's last words of caution, his own boyish promise not to claim kindred with his relations in England, were vividly present to the mind of Amelius, while he waited for the return of the messenger. His one justification was in the motives that animated him. Circumstances, which his father had never anticipated, rendered it an act of duty towards himself to make the trial at least of what his family interest could do for him. There could be no sort of doubt that a man of Mr. Farnaby's character would yield, if Amelius could announce that he had the promise of an appointment under Government--with the powerful influence of a near relation to accelerate his promotion. He sat, idly drawing lines on the blotting-paper; at one moment regretting that he had sent his letter; at another, comforting himself in the belief that, if his father had been living to advise him, his father would have approved of the course that he had taken.

The messenger returned with these lines of reply:--

"Under any ordinary circumstances, I should have used my influence to help you on in the world. But, when you not only hold the most abominable political opinions, but actually proclaim those opinions in public, I am amazed at your audacity in writing to me. There must be no more communication between us. While you are a Socialist, you are a stranger to me."

Amelius accepted this new rebuff with ominous composure. He sat quietly smoking in the deserted room, with his uncle's letter in his hand.

Among the other disastrous results of the lecture, some of the newspapers had briefly reported it. Preoccupied by his anxieties, Amelius had forgotten this when he wrote to his relative. "Just like me!" he thought, as he threw the letter into the fire. His last hopes floated up the chimney, with the tiny puff of smoke from the burnt paper. There was now no other chance of shortening the marriage engagement left to try. He had already applied to the good friend whom he had mentioned to Regina. The answer, kindly written in this case, had not been very encouraging:--

"I have other claims to consider. All that I can do, I will do. Don't be disheartened--I only ask you to wait."

Amelius rose to go home--and sat down again. His natural energy seemed to have deserted him--it required an effort to leave the club. He took up the

newspapers, and threw them aside, one after another. Not one of the unfortunate writers and reporters could please him on that inauspicious day. It was only while he was lighting his second cigar that he remembered Mrs. Farnaby's unread letter to him. By this time, he was more than weary of his own affairs. He read the letter.

"I find the people who have my happiness at their mercy both dilatory and greedy." (Mrs. Farnaby wrote); "but the little that I can persuade them to tell me is very favourable to my hopes. I am still, to my annoyance, only in personal communication with the hateful old woman. The young man either sends messages, or writes to me through the post. By this latter means he has accurately described, not only in which of my child's feet the fault exists, but the exact position which it occupies. Here, you will agree with me, is positive evidence that he is speaking the truth, whoever he is.

"But for this reassuring circumstance, I should feel inclined to be suspicious of some things--of the obstinate manner, for instance, in which the young man keeps himself concealed; also, of his privately warning me not to trust the woman who is his own messenger, and not to tell her on any account of the information which his letters convey to me. I feel that I ought to be cautious with him on the question of money--and yet, in my eagerness to see my darling, I am ready to give him all that he asks for. In this uncertain state of mind, I am restrained, strangely enough, by the old woman herself. She warns me that he is the sort of man, if he once gets the money, to spare himself the trouble of earning it. It is the one hold I have over him (she says)--so I control the burning impatience that consumes me as well as I can.

"No! I must not attempt to describe my own state of mind. When I tell you that I am actually afraid of dying before I can give my sweet love the first kiss, you will understand and pity me. When night comes, I feel sometimes half mad.

"I send you my present address, in the hope that you will write and cheer me a little. I must not ask you to come and see me yet. I am not fit for it--and, besides, I am under a promise, in the present state of the negotiations, to shut the door on my friends. It is easy enough to do that; I have no friend, Amelius, but you.

"Try to feel compassionately towards me, my kind-hearted boy. For so many long years, my heart has had nothing to feed on but the one hope that is now being realized at last. No sympathy between my husband and me (on the contrary, a horrid unacknowledged enmity, which has always kept us

apart); my father and mother, in their time both wretched about my marriage, and with good reason; my only sister dying in poverty--what a life for a childless woman! don't let us dwell on it any longer.

"Goodbye for the present, Amelius. I beg you will not think I am always wretched. When I want to be happy, I look to the coming time."

This melancholy letter added to the depression that weighed on the spirits of Amelius. It inspired him with vague fears for Mrs. Farnaby. In her own interests, he would have felt himself tempted to consult Rufus (without mentioning names), if the American had been in London. As things were, he put the letter back in his pocket with a sigh. Even Mrs. Farnaby, in her sad moments, had a consoling prospect to contemplate. "Everybody but me!" Amelius thought.

His reflections were interrupted by the appearance of an idle young member of the club, with whom he was acquainted. The new-comer remarked that he looked out of spirits, and suggested that they should dine together and amuse themselves somewhere in the evening. Amelius accepted the proposal: any man who offered him a refuge from himself was a friend to him on that day. Departing from his temperate habits, he deliberately drank more than usual. The wine excited him for the time, and then left him more depressed than ever; and the amusements of the evening produced the same result. He returned to his cottage so completely disheartened, that he regretted the day when he had left Tadmor.

But he kept his appointment, the next morning, to take leave of Regina.

The carriage was at the door, with a luggage-laden cab waiting behind it. Mr. Farnaby's ill-temper vented itself in predictions that they would be too late to catch the train. His harsh voice, alternating with Regina's meek remonstrances, reached the ears of Amelius from the breakfast-room. "I'm not going to wait for the gentleman-Socialist," Mr. Farnaby announced, with his hardest sarcasm of tone. "Dear uncle, we have a quarter of an hour to spare!" "We have nothing of the sort; we want all that time to register the luggage." The servant's voice was heard next. "Mr. Goldenheart, miss." Mr. Farnaby instantly stepped into the hall. "Goodbye!" he called to Amelius, through the open door of the dining-room--and passed straight on to the carriage. "I shan't wait, Regina!" he shouted, from the doorstep. "Let him go by himself!" said Amelius indignantly, as Regina hurried into the room. "Oh, hush, hush, dear! Suppose he heard you? No week shall pass without my writing to you; promise you will write back, Amelius. One more kiss! Oh, my dear!" The servant interposed, keeping discreetly out of sight. "I beg your

pardon, miss, my master wishes to know whether you are going with him or not." Regina waited to hear no more. She gave her lover a farewell look to remember her by, and ran out.

That innate depravity which Amelius had lately discovered in his own nature, let the forbidden thoughts loose in him again as he watched the departing carriage from the door. "If poor little Sally had been in her place--!" He made an effort of virtuous resolution, and stopped there. "What a blackguard a man may be," he penitently reflected, "without suspecting it himself!"

He descended the house-steps. The discreet servant wished him good morning, with a certain cheery respect--the man was delighted to have seen the last of his hard master for some months to come. Amelius stopped and turned round, smiling grimly. He was in such a reckless humour, that he was even ready to divert his mind by astonishing a footman. "Richard," he said, "are you engaged to be married?" Richard stared in blank surprise at the strange question--and modestly admitted that he was engaged to marry the housemaid next door. "Soon?" asked Amelius, swinging his stick. "As soon as I have saved a little more money, sir." "Damn the money!" cried Amelius--and struck his stick on the pavement, and walked away with a last look at the house as if he hated the sight of it. Richard watched the departing young gentleman, and shook his head ominously as he shut the door.

CHAPTER 2

Amelius went straight back to the cottage, with the one desperate purpose of reverting to the old plan, and burying himself in his books. Surveying his well-filled shelves with an impatience unworthy of a scholar, Hume's "History of England" unhappily caught his eye. He took down the first volume. In less than half an hour he discovered that Hume could do nothing for him. Wisely inspired, he turned to the truer history next, which men call fiction. The writings of the one supreme genius, who soars above all other novelists as Shakespeare soars above all other dramatists--the writings of Walter Scott--had their place of honour in his library. The collection of the Waverley Novels at Tadmor had not been complete. Enviable Amelius had still to read Rob Roy. He opened the book. For the rest of the day he was in love with Diana Vernon; and when he looked out once or twice at the garden to rest his eyes, he saw "Andrew Fairservice" busy over the flowerbeds.

He closed the last page of the noble story as Toff came in to lay the cloth for dinner.

The master at table and the servant behind his chair were accustomed to gossip pleasantly during meals. Amelius did his best to carry on the talk as usual. But he was no longer in the delightful world of illusion which Scott had opened to him. The hard realities of his own everyday life had gathered round him again. Observing him with unobtrusive attention, the Frenchman soon perceived the absence of the easy humour and the excellent appetite which distinguished his young master at other times.

"May I venture to make a remark, sir?" Toff inquired, after a long pause in the conversation.

"Certainly."

"And may I take the liberty of expressing my sentiments freely?"

"Of course you may."

"Dear sir, you have a pretty little simple dinner to-day," Toff began. "Forgive me for praising myself, I am influenced by the natural pride of having cooked the dinner. For soup, you have Croute au pot; for meat, you have Tourne-dos a la sauce poivrade; for pudding, you have Pommes au beurre. All so nice--and you hardly eat anything, and your amiable conversation

falls into a melancholy silence which fills me with regret. Is it you who are to blame for this? No, sir! it is the life you lead. I call it the life of a monk; I call it the life of a hermit--I say boldly it is the life of all others which is most unsympathetic to a young man like you. Pardon the warmth of my expressions; I am eager to make my language the language of utmost delicacy. May I quote a little song? It is in an old, old, old French piece, long since forgotten, called 'Les Maris Garcons'. There are two lines in that song (I have often heard my good father sing them) which I will venture to apply to your case; 'Amour, delicatesse, et gaite; D'un bon Francais c'est la devise!' Sir, you have naturally delicatesse and gaite--but the last has, for some days, been under a cloud. What is wanted to remove that cloud? L'Amour! Love, as you say in English. Where is the charming woman, who is the only ornament wanting to this sweet cottage? Why is she still invisible? Remedy that unhappy oversight, sir. You are here in a suburban Paradise. I consult my long experience; and I implore you to invite Eve.--Ha! you smile; your lost gaiety returns, and you feel it as I do. Might I propose another glass of claret, and the reappearance on the table of the Tourne-dos a la poivrade?"

It was impossible to be melancholy in this man's company. Amelius sanctioned the return of the Tourne-dos, and tried the other glass of claret. "My good friend," he said, with something like a return of his old easy way, "you talk about charming women, and your long experience. Let's hear what your experience has been."

For the first time Toff began to look a little confused.

"You have honoured me, sir, by calling me your good friend," he said. "After that, I am sure you will not send me away if I own the truth. No! My heart tells me I shall not appeal to your indulgence in vain. Dear sir, in the holidays which you kindly give me, I provide competent persons to take care of the house in my absence, don't I? One person, if you remember, was a most handsome engaging young man. He is, if you please, my son by my first wife--now an angel in heaven. Another person, who took care of the house, on the next occasion, was a little black-eyed boy; a miracle of discretion for his age. He is my son by my second wife--now another angel in heaven. Forgive me, I have not done yet. Some few days since, you thought you heard an infant crying downstairs. Like a miserable wretch, I lied; I declared it was the infant in the next house. Ah, sir, it was my own cherubim baby by my third wife--an angel close by in the Edgeware Road, established in a small milliner shop, which will expand to great things by-and-by. The intervals between my marriages are not worthy of your notice. Fugitive caprices, sir--fugitive caprices! To sum it all up (as you say in England), it is not in me to resist the enchanting sex. If my third angel dies,

I shall tear my hair--but I shall none the less take a fourth."

"Take a dozen if you like," said Amelius. "Why should you have kept all this from my knowledge?"

Toff hung his head. "I think it was one of my foreign mistakes," he pleaded. "The servants' advertisements in your English newspapers frighten me. How does the most meritorious manservant announce himself when he wants the best possible place? He says he is 'without encumbrances.' Gracious heaven, what a dreadful word to describe the poor pretty harmless children! I was afraid, sir, you might have some English objection to my 'encumbrances.' A young man, a boy, and a cherubim-baby; not to speak of the sacred memories of two women, and the charming occasional society of a third; all inextricably enveloped in the life of one amorous-meritorious French person--surely there was reason for hesitation here? No matter; I bless my stars I know better now, and I withdraw myself from further notice. Permit me to recall your attention to the Roquefort cheese, and a mouthful of potato-salad to correct the richness of him."

The dinner was over at last. Amelius was alone again.

It was a still evening. Not a breath of wind stirred among the trees in the garden; no vehicles passed along the by-road in which the cottage stood. Now and then, Toff was audible downstairs, singing French songs in a high cracked voice, while he washed the plates and dishes, and set everything in order for the night. Amelius looked at his bookshelves--and felt that, after Rob Roy, there was no more reading for him that evening. The slow minutes followed one another wearily; the deadly depression of the earlier hours of the day was stealthily fastening its hold on him again. How might he best resist it? His healthy out-of-door habits at Tadmor suggested the only remedy that he could think of. Be his troubles what they might, his one simple method of resisting them, at all other times, was his simple method now. He went out for a walk.

For two hours he rambled about the great north-western suburb of London. Perhaps he felt the heavy oppressive weather, or perhaps his good dinner had not agreed with him. Any way, he was so thoroughly worn out, that he was obliged to return to the cottage in a cab.

Toff opened the door--but not with his customary alacrity. Amelius was too completely fatigued to notice any trifling circumstance. Otherwise, he would certainly have perceived something odd in the old Frenchman's withered face. He looked at his master, as he relieved him of his hat and coat, with

the strangest expression of interest and anxiety; modified by a certain sardonic sense of amusement underlying the more serious emotions. "A nasty dull evening," Amelius said wearily. And Toff, always eager to talk at other times, only answered, "Yes, sir"--and retreated at once to the kitchen regions.

The fire was bright; the curtains were drawn; the reading-lamp, with its ample green shade, was on the table--a more comfortable room no man could have found to receive him after a long walk. Reclining at his ease in his chair, Amelius thought of ringing for some restorative brandy-and-water. While he was thinking, he fell asleep; and, while he slept, he dreamed.

Was it a dream?

He certainly saw the library--not fantastically transformed, but just like what the room really was. So far, he might have been wide awake, looking at the familiar objects round him. But, after a while, an event happened which set the laws of reality at defiance. Simple Sally, miles away in the Home, made her appearance in the library, nevertheless. He saw the drawn curtains over the window parted from behind; he saw the girl step out from them, and stop, looking at him timidly. She was clothed in the plain dress that he had bought for her; and she looked more charming in it than ever. The beauty of health claimed kindred now, in her pretty face, with the beauty of youth: the wan cheeks had begun to fill out, and the pale lips were delicately suffused with their natural rosy red. Little by little her first fears seemed to subside. She smiled, and softly crossed the room, and stood at his side. After looking at him with a rapt expression of tenderness and delight, she laid her hands on the arm of the chair, and said, in the quaintly quiet way which he remembered so well, "I want to kiss you." She bent over him, and kissed him with the innocent freedom of a child. Then she raised herself again, and looked backwards and forwards between Amelius and the lamp. "The firelight is the best," she said. Darkness fell over the room as she spoke; he saw her no more; he heard her no more. A blank interval followed; there flowed over him the oblivion of perfect sleep. His next conscious sensation was a feeling of cold--he shivered, and woke.

The impression of the dream was in his mind at the moment of waking. He started as he raised himself in the chair. Was he dreaming still? No; he was certainly awake. And, as certainly, the room was dark!

He looked and looked. It was not to be denied, or explained away. There was the fire burning low, and leaving the room chilly--and there, just visible on the table, in the flicker of the dying flame, was the extinguished lamp!

He mended the fire, and put his hand on the bell to ring for Toff, and thought better of it. What need had he of the lamplight? He was too weary for reading; he preferred going to sleep again, and dreaming again of Sally. Where was the harm in dreaming of the poor little soul, so far away from him? The happiest part of his life now was the part of it that was passed in sleep.

As the fresh coals began to kindle feebly, he looked again at the lamp. It was odd, to say the least of it, that the light should have accidentally gone out, exactly at the right time to realize the fanciful extinction of it in his dream. How was it there was no smell of a burnt-out lamp? He was too lazy, or too tired, to pursue the question. Let the mystery remain a mystery--and let him rest in peace! He settled himself fretfully in his chair. What a fool he was to bother his head about a lamp, instead of closing his eyes and going to sleep again!

The room began to recover its pleasant temperature. He shifted the cushion in the chair, so that it supported his head in perfect comfort, and composed himself to rest. But the capricious influences of sleep had deserted him: he tried one position after another, and all in vain. It was a mere mockery even to shut his eyes. He resigned himself to circumstances, and stretched out his legs, and looked at the companionable fire.

Of late he had thought more frequently than usual of his past days in the Community. His mind went back again now to that bygone time. The clock on the mantelpiece struck nine. They were all at supper, at Tadmor--talking over the events of the day. He saw himself again at the long wooden table, with shy little Mellicent in the chair next to him, and his favourite dog at his feet waiting to be fed. Where was Mellicent now? It was a sad letter that she had written to him, with the strange fixed idea that he was to return to her one day. There was something very winning and lovable about the poor creature who had lived such a hard life at home, and had suffered so keenly. It was a comfort to think that she would go back to the Community. What happier destiny could she hope for? Would she take care of his dog for him when she went back? They had all promised to be kind to his pet animals in his absence; but the dog was fond of Mellicent; he would be happier with Mellicent than with the rest of them. And his little tame fawn, and his birds--how were they doing? He had not even written to inquire after them; he had been cruelly forgetful of those harmless dumb loving friends. In his present solitude, in his dreary doubts of the future, what would he not give to feel the dog nestling in his bosom, and the fawn's little rough tongue licking his hand! His heart ached as he thought of it: a choking hysterical sensation

oppressed his breathing. He tried to rise, and ring for lights, and rouse his manhood to endure and resist. It was not to be done. Where was his courage? where was the cheerfulness which had never failed him at other time? He sank back in the chair, and hid his face in his hands for shame at his own weakness, and burst out crying.

The touch of soft persuasive fingers suddenly thrilled through him.

His hands were gently drawn away from his face; a familiar voice, sweet and low, said, "Oh, don't cry!" Dimly through his tears he saw the well-remembered little figure standing between him and the fire. In his unendurable loneliness, he had longed for his dog, he had longed for his fawn. There was the martyred creature from the streets, whom he had rescued from nameless horror, waiting to be his companion, servant, friend! There was the child-victim of cold and hunger, still only feeling her way to womanhood; innocent of all other aspirations, so long as she might fill the place which had once been occupied by the dog and the fawn!

Amelius looked at her with a momentary doubt whether he was waking or sleeping. "Good God!" he cried, "am I dreaming again?"

"No," she said, simply. "You are awake this time. Let me dry your eyes; I know where you put your handkerchief." She perched on his knee, and wiped away the tears, and smoothed his hair over his forehead. "I was frightened to show myself till I heard you crying," she confessed. "Then I thought, 'Come! he can't be angry with me now'--and I crept out from behind the curtains there. The old man let me in. I can't live without seeing you; I've tried till I could try no longer. I owned it to the old man when he opened the door. I said, 'I only want to look at him; won't you let me in?' And he says, 'God bless me, here's Eve come already!' I don't know what he meant--he let me in, that's all I care about. He's a funny old foreigner. Send him away; I'm to be your servant now. Why were you crying? I've cried often enough about You. No; that can't be--I can't expect you to cry about me; I can only expect you to scold me. I know I'm a bad girl."

She cast one doubtful look at him, and hung her head--waiting to be scolded. Amelius lost all control over himself. He took her in his arms and kissed her again and again. "You are a dear good grateful little creature!" he burst out--and suddenly stopped, aware too late of the act of imprudence which he had committed. He put her away from him; he tried to ask severe questions, and to administer merited reproof. Even if he had succeeded, Sally was too happy to listen to him. "It's all right now," she cried. "I'm never, never, never to go back to the Home! Oh, I'm so happy! Let's light the

lamp again!"

She found the matchbox on the chimneypiece. In a minute more the room was bright. Amelius sat looking at her, perfectly incapable of deciding what he ought to say or do next. To complete his bewilderment, the voice of the attentive old Frenchman made itself heard through the door, in discreetly confidential tones.

"I have prepared an appetising little supper, sir," said Toff. "Be pleased to ring when you and the young lady are ready."

CHAPTER 3

Toff's interference proved to have its use. The announcement of the little supper--plainly implying Simple Sally's reception at the cottage--reminded Amelius of his responsibilities. He at once stepped out into the passage, and closed the door behind him.

The old Frenchman was waiting to be reprimanded or thanked, as the case might be, with his head down, his shoulders shrugged up to his ears, and the palms of his hands spread out appealingly on either side of him--a model of mute resignation to circumstances.

"Do you know that you have put me in a very awkward position?" Amelius began.

Toff lifted one of his hands to his heart. "You are aware of my weakness, sir. When that charming little creature presented herself at the door, sinking with fatigue, I could no more resist her than I could take a hop-skip-and-jump over the roof of this cottage. If I have done wrong, take no account of the proud fidelity with which I have served you--tell me to pack up and go; but don't ask me to assume a position of severity towards that enchanting Miss. It is not in my heart to do it," said Toff, lifting his eyes with tearful solemnity to an imaginary heaven. "On my sacred word of honour as a Frenchman, I would die rather than do it!"

"Don't talk nonsense," Amelius rejoined a little impatiently. "I don't blame you--but you have got me into a scrape, for all that. If I did my duty, I should send for a cab, and take her back."

Toff opened his twinkling old eyes in a perfect transport of astonishment. "What!" he cried, "take her back? Without rest, without supper? And you call that duty? How inconceivably ugly does duty look when it assumes an inhospitable aspect towards a woman! Pardon me, sir; I must express my sentiments or I shall burst. You will say perhaps that I have no conception of duty? Pardon me again--my conception of duty is here!"

He threw open the door of the sitting-room. In spite of his anxiety, Amelius burst out laughing. The Frenchman's inexhaustible contrivances had transformed the sitting-room into a bedroom for Sally. The sofa had become a snug little white bed; a hairbrush and comb, and a bottle of eau-de-cologne, were on the table; a bath stood near the fire, with cans of hot and

cold water, and a railway rug placed under them to save the carpet. "I dare not presume to contradict you, sir," said Toff, "but there is my conception of duty! In the kitchen, I have another conception, keeping warm; you can smell it up the stairs. Salmi of partridge, with the littlest possible dash of garlic in the sauce. Oh, sir, let that angel rest and refresh herself! Virtuous severity, believe me, is a most horribly unbecoming virtue at your age!" He spoke quite seriously, with the air of a profound moralist, asserting principles that did equal honour to his head and his heart.

Amelius went back to the library.

Sally was resting in the easy-chair; her position showed plainly that she was suffering from fatigue. "I have had a long, long walk," she said; "and I don't know which aches worst, my back or my feet. I don't care--I'm quite happy now I'm here." She nestled herself comfortably in the chair. "Do you mind my looking at you?" she asked. "Oh, it's so long since I saw you!"

There was a new undertone of tenderness in her voice--innocent tenderness that openly avowed itself. The reviving influences of the life at the Home had done much--and had much yet left to do. Her wasted face and figure were filling out, her cheeks and lips were regaining their lovely natural colour, as Amelius had seen in his dream. But her eyes, in repose, still resumed their vacantly patient look; and her manner, with a perceptible increase of composure and confidence, had not lost its quaint childish charm. Her growth from girl to woman was a growth of fine gradations, guided by the unerring deliberation of Nature and Time.

"Do you think they will follow you here, from the Home?" Amelius asked.

She looked at the clock. "I don't think so," she said quietly. "It's hours since I slipped out by the back door. They have very strict rules about runaway girls--even when their friends bring them back. If you send me back--" she stopped, and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"What will you do, if I send you back?"

"What one of our girls did, before they took her in at the Home. She jumped into the river. 'Made a hole in the water'; that's how she calls it. She's a big strong girl; and they got her out, and saved her. She says it wasn't painful, till they brought her to again. I'm little and weak--I don't think they could bring me to life, if they tried."

Amelius made a futile attempt to reason with her. He even got so far as to

tell her that she had done very wrong to leave the Home. Sally's answer set all further expostulation at defiance. Instead of attempting to defend herself, she sighed wearily, and said, "I had no money; I walked all the way here."

The well-intended remonstrances of Amelius were lost in compassionate surprise. "You poor little soul!" he exclaimed, "it must be seven or eight miles at least!"

"I dare say," said Sally. "It don't matter, now I've found you."

"But how did you find me? Who told you where I lived?"

She smiled, and took from her bosom the photograph of the cottage.

"But Mrs. Payson cut off the address!" cried Amelius, bursting out with the truth in the impulse of the moment.

Sally turned over the photograph, and pointed to the back of the card, on which the photographer's name and address were printed. "Mrs. Payson didn't think of this," she said shyly.

"Did you think of it?" Amelius asked.

Sally shook her head. "I'm too stupid," she replied. "The girl who made the hole in the water put me up to it. 'Have you made up your mind to run away?' she says. And I said, 'Yes.' 'You go to the man who did the picture,' she says; 'he knows where the place is, I'll be bound.' I asked my way till I found him. And he did know. And he told me. He was a good sort; he gave me a glass of beer, he said I looked so tired. I said we'd go and have our portraits taken some day--you, and your servant. May I tell the funny old foreigner that he is to go away now I have come to you?" The complete simplicity with which she betrayed her jealousy of Toff made Amelius smile. Sally, watching every change in his face, instantly drew her own conclusion. "Ah!" she said cheerfully, "I'll keep your room cleaner than he keeps it! I smelt dust on the curtains when I was hiding from you."

Amelius thought of his dream. "Did you come out while I was asleep?" he asked.

"Yes; I wasn't frightened of you, when you were asleep. I had a good look at you; and I gave you a kiss." She made that confession without the slightest sign of confusion; her calm blue eyes looked him straight in the face. "You got restless," she went on; "and I got frightened again. I put out the lamp. I

says to myself, 'If he does scold me, I can bear it better in the dark.'"

Amelius listened, wondering. Had he seen drowsily what he thought he had dreamed, or was there some mysterious sympathy between Sally and himself? The occult speculations were interrupted by Sally. "May I take off my bonnet, and make myself tidy?" she asked. Some men might have said No. Amelius was not one of them.

The library possessed a door of communication with the sitting-room; the bedchamber occupied by Amelius being on the other side of the cottage. When Sally saw Toff's reconstructed room, she stood at the door, in speechless admiration of the vision of luxury revealed to her. From time to time Amelius, alone in the library, heard her dabbling in her bath, and humming the artless old English song from which she had taken her name. Once she knocked at the closed door, and made a request through it--"There is scent on the table; may I have some?" And once Toff knocked at the other door, opening into the passage, and asked when "pretty young Miss" would be ready for supper. Events went on in the little household as if Sally had become an integral part of it already. "What am I to do?" Amelius asked himself. And Toff, entering at the moment to lay the cloth, answered respectfully, "Hurry the young person, sir, or the salmi will be spoilt."

She came out from her room, walking delicately on her sore feet--so fresh and charming, that Toff, absorbed in admiration, made a mistake in folding a napkin for the first time in his life. "Champagne, of course, sir?" he said in confidence to Amelius. The salmi of partridge appeared; the inspiriting wine sparkled in the glasses; Toff surpassed himself in all the qualities which made a servant invaluable at a supper table. Sally forgot the Home, forgot the cruel streets, and laughed and chattered as gaily as the happiest girl living. Amelius, expanding in the joyous atmosphere of youth and good spirits, shook off his sense of responsibility, and became once more the delightful companion who won everybody's love. The effervescent gaiety of the evening was at its climax; the awful forms of duty, propriety, and good sense had been long since laughed out of the room--when Nemesis, goddess of retribution, announced her arrival outside, by a crashing of carriage-wheels and a peremptory ring at the cottage bell.

There was dead silence; Amelius and Sally looked at each other. The experienced Toff at once guessed what had happened. "Is it her father or mother?" he asked of Amelius, a little anxiously. Hearing that she had never even seen her father or mother, he snapped his fingers joyously, and led the way on tiptoe into the hall. "I have my idea," he whispered. "Let us listen."

A woman's voice, high, clear, and resolute, speaking apparently to the coachman, was the next audible sound. "Say I come from Mrs. Payson, and must see Mr. Goldenheart directly." Sally trembled and turned pale. "The matron!" she said faintly. "Oh, don't let her in!" Amelius took the terrified girl back to the library. Toff followed them, respectfully asking to be told what a "matron" was. Receiving the necessary explanation, he expressed his contempt for matrons bent on carrying charming persons into captivity, by opening the library door and spitting into the hall. Having relieved his mind in this way, he returned to his master and laid a lank skinny forefinger cunningly along the side of his nose. "I suppose, sir, you don't want to see this furious woman?" he said. Before it was possible to say anything in reply, another ring at the bell announced that the furious woman wanted to see Amelius. Toff read his master's wishes in his master's face. Not even this emergency could find him unprepared: he was as ready to circumvent a matron as to cook a dinner. "The shutters are up, and the curtains are drawn," he reminded Amelius. "Not a morsel of light is visible outside. Let them ring--we have all gone to bed." He turned to Sally, grinning with impish enjoyment of his own stratagem. "Ha, Miss! what do you think of that?" There was a third pull at the bell as he spoke. "Ring away, Missess Matrone!" he cried. "We are fast asleep--wake us if you can." The fourth ring was the last. A sharp crack revealed the breaking of the bellwire, and was followed by the shrill fall of the iron handle on the pavement before the garden gate. The gate, like the palings, was protected at the top from invading cats. "Compose yourself, Miss," said Toff, "if she tries to get over the gate, she will stick on the spikes." In another moment, the sound of retiring carriage-wheels announced the defeat of the matron, and settled the serious question of receiving Sally for the night.

She sat silent by the window, when Toff had left the room, holding back the curtains and looking out at the murky sky.

"What are you looking for?" Amelius asked.

"I was looking for the stars."

Amelius joined her at the window. "There are no stars to be seen tonight."

She let the curtain fall to again. "I was thinking of night-time at the Home," she said. "You see, I got on pretty well, in the day, with my reading and writing. I wanted so to improve myself. My mind was troubled with the fear of your despising such an ignorant creature as I am; so I kept on at my lessons. I thought I might surprise you by writing you a pretty letter some day. One of the teachers (she's gone away ill) was very good to me. I used to

talk to her; and, when I said a wrong word, she took me up, and told me the right one. She said you would think better of me when you heard me speak properly--and I do speak better, don't I? All this was in the day. It was the night that was the hard time to get through--when the other girls were all asleep, and I had nothing to think of but how far away I was from you. I used to get up, and put the counterpane round me, and stand at the window. On fine nights the stars were company to me. There were two stars, near together, that I got to know. Don't laugh at me--I used to think one of them was you, and one of them me. I wondered whether you would die, or I should die, before I saw you again. And, most always, it was my star that went out first. Lord, how I used to cry! It got into my poor stupid head that I should never see you again. I do believe I ran away because of that. You won't tell anybody, will you? It was so foolish, I am ashamed of it now. I wanted to see your star and my star tonight. I don't know why. Oh, I'm so fond of you!" She dropped on her knees, and took his hand, and put it on her head. "It's burning hot," she said, "and your kind hand cools it."

Amelius raised her gently, and led her to the door of her room. "My poor Sally, you are quite worn out. You want rest and sleep. Let us say good night."

"I will do anything you tell me," she answered. "If Mrs. Payson comes tomorrow, you won't let her take me away? Thank you. Goodnight." She put her hands on his shoulders, with innocent familiarity, and lifted herself to him on tiptoe, and kissed him as a sister might have kissed him.

Long after Sally was asleep in her bed, Amelius sat by the library fire, thinking.

The revival of the crushed feeling and fancy in the girl's nature, so artlessly revealed in her sad little story of the stars that were "company to her," not only touched and interested him, but clouded his view of the future with doubts and anxieties which had never troubled him until that moment. The mysterious influences under which the girl's development was advancing were working morally and physically together. Weeks might pass harmlessly, months might pass harmlessly--but the time must come when the innocent relations between them would be beset by peril. Unable, as yet, fully to realize these truths, Amelius nevertheless felt them vaguely. His face was troubled, as he lit the candle at last to go to his bed. "I don't see my way as clearly as I could wish," he reflected. "How will it end?"

How indeed!

CHAPTER 4

At eight o'clock the next morning, Amelius was awakened by Toff. A letter had arrived, marked "Immediate," and the messenger was waiting for an answer.

The letter was from Mrs. Payson. She wrote briefly, and in formal terms. After referring to the matron's fruitless visit to the cottage on the previous night, Mrs. Payson proceeded in these words:--"I request you will immediately let me know whether Sally has taken refuge with you, and has passed the night under your roof. If I am right in believing that she has done so, I have only to inform you that the doors of the Home are henceforth closed to her, in conformity with our rules. If I am wrong, it will be my painful duty to lose no time in placing the matter in the hands of the police."

Amelius began his reply, acting on impulse as usual. He wrote, vehemently remonstrating with Mrs. Payson on the unforgiving and unchristian nature of the rules at the Home. Before he was halfway through his composition, the person who had brought the letter sent a message to say that he was expected back immediately, and that he hoped Mr. Goldenheart would not get a poor man into trouble by keeping him much longer. Checked in the full flow of his eloquence, Amelius angrily tore up the unfinished remonstrance, and matched Mrs. Payson's briefly business-like language by an answer in one line:--"I beg to inform you that you are quite right." On reflection, he felt that the second letter was not only discourteous as a reply to a lady, but also ungrateful as addressed to Mrs. Payson personally. At the third attempt, he wrote becomingly as well as briefly. "Sally has passed the night here, as my guest. She was suffering from severe fatigue; it would have been an act of downright inhumanity to send her away. I regret your decision, but of course I submit to it. You once said, you believed implicitly in the purity of my motives. Do me the justice, however you may blame my conduct, to believe in me still."

Having despatched these lines, the mind of Amelius was at ease again, He went into the library, and listened to hear if Sally was moving. The perfect silence on the other side of the door informed him that the weary girl was still fast asleep. He gave directions that she was on no account to be disturbed, and sat down to breakfast by himself.

While he was still at table, Toff appeared, with profound mystery in his manner, and discreet confidence in the tones of his voice. "Here's another

one, sir!" the Frenchman announced, in his master's ear.

"Another one?" Amelius repeated. "What do you mean?"

"She is not like the sweet little sleeping Miss." Toff explained. "This time, sir, it's the beauty of the devil himself, as we say in France. She refuses to confide in me; and she appears to be agitated--both bad signs. Shall I get rid of her before the other Miss wakes?"

"Hasn't she got a name?" Amelius asked.

Toff answered, in his foreign accent, "One name only--Faybay."

"Do you mean Phoebe?"

"Have I not said it, sir?"

"Show her in directly."

Toff glanced at the door of Sally's room, shrugged his shoulders, and obeyed his instructions.

Phoebe appeared, looking pale and anxious. Her customary assurance of manner had completely deserted her: she stopped in the doorway, as if she was afraid to enter the room.

"Come in, and sit down," said Amelius. "What's the matter?"

"I'm troubled in my mind, sir," Phoebe answered. "I know it's taking a liberty to come to you. But I went yesterday to ask Miss Regina's advice, and found she had gone abroad with her uncle. I have something to say about Mrs. Farnaby, sir; and there's no time to be lost in saying it. I know of nobody but you that I can speak to, now Miss Regina is away. The footman told me where you lived."

She stopped, evidently in the greatest embarrassment. Amelius tried to encourage her. "If I can be of any use to Mrs. Farnaby," he said, "tell me at once what to do."

Phoebe's eyes dropped before his straightforward look as he spoke to her.

"I must ask you to please excuse my mentioning names, sir," she resumed confusedly. "There's a person I'm interested in, whom I wouldn't get into

trouble for the whole world. He's been misled--I'm sure he's been misled by another person--a wicked drunken old woman, who ought to be in prison if she had her deserts. I'm not free from blame myself--I know I'm not. I listened, sir, to what I oughtn't to have heard; and I told it again (I'm sure in the strictest confidence, and not meaning anything wrong) to the person I've mentioned. Not the old women--I mean the person I'm interested in. I hope you understand me, sir? I wish to speak openly, excepting the names, on account of Mrs. Farnaby."

Amelius thought of Phoebe's vindictive language the last time he had seen her. He looked towards a cabinet in a corner of the room, in which he had placed Mrs. Farnaby's letter. An instinctive distrust of his visitor began to rise in his mind. His manner altered--he turned to his plate, and went on with his breakfast. "Can't you speak to me plainly?" he said. "Is Mrs. Farnaby in any trouble?"

"Yes, sir."

"And can I do anything to help her out of it?"

"I am sure you can, sir--if you only know where to find her."

"I do know where to find her. She has written to tell me. The last time I saw you, you expressed yourself very improperly about Mrs. Farnaby; you spoke as if you meant some harm to her."

"I mean nothing but good to her now, sir."

"Very well, then. Can't you go and speak to her yourself, if I give you the address?"

Phoebe's pale face flushed a little. "I couldn't do that, sir," she answered, "after the way Mrs. Farnaby has treated me. Besides, if she knew that I had listened to what passed between her and you--" She stopped again, more painfully embarrassed than ever.

Amelius laid down his knife and fork. "Look here!" he said; "this sort of thing is not in my way. If you can't make a clean breast of it, let's talk of something else. I'm very much afraid," he went on, with his customary absence of all concealment, "you're not the harmless sort of girl I once took you for. What do you mean by 'what passed between Mrs. Farnaby and me'?"

Phoebe put her handkerchief to her eyes. "It's very hard to speak to me so harshly," she said, "when I'm sorry for what I've done, and am only anxious to prevent harm coming of it."

"What have you done?" cried honest Amelius, weary of the woman's inveterately indirect way of explaining herself to him.

The flash of his quick temper in his eyes, as he put that straightforward question, roused a responsive temper in Phoebe which stung her into speaking openly at last. She told Amelius what she had heard in the kitchen as plainly as she had told it to Jervy--with this one difference, that she spoke without insolence when she referred to Mrs. Farnaby.

Listening in silence until she had done, Amelius started to his feet, and opening the cabinet, took from it Mrs. Farnaby's letter. He read the letter, keeping his back towards Phoebe--waited a moment thinking--and suddenly turned on the woman with a look that made her shrink in her chair. "You wretch!" he said; "you detestable wretch!"

In the terror of the moment, Phoebe attempted to leave the room. Amelius stopped her instantly. "Sit down again," he said; "I mean to have the whole truth out of you, now."

Phoebe recovered her courage. "You have had the whole truth, sir; I could tell you no more if I was on my deathbed."

Amelius refused to believe her. "There is a vile conspiracy against Mrs. Farnaby," he said. "Do you mean to tell me you are not in it?"

"So help me God, sir, I never even heard of it till yesterday!"

The tone in which she spoke shook the conviction of Amelius; the indescribable ring of truth was in it.

"There are two people who are cruelly deluding and plundering this poor lady," he went on. "Who are they?"

"I told you, if you remember, that I couldn't mention names, sir."

Amelius looked again at the letter. After what he had heard, there was no difficulty in identifying the invisible "young man," alluded to by Mrs. Farnaby, with the unnamed "person" in whom Phoebe was interested. Who was he? As the question passed through his mind, Amelius remembered the

vagabond whom he had recognized with Phoebe, in the street. There was no doubt of it now--the man who was directing the conspiracy in the dark was Jervy! Amelius would unquestionably have been rash enough to reveal this discovery, if Phoebe had not stopped him. His renewed reference to Mrs. Farnaby's letter and his sudden silence after looking at it roused the woman's suspicions. "If you're planning to get my friend into trouble," she burst out, "not another word shall pass my lips!"

Even Amelius profited by the warning which that threat unintentionally conveyed to him.

"Keep your own secrets," he said; "I only want to spare Mrs. Farnaby a dreadful disappointment. But I must know what I am talking about when I go to her. Can't you tell me how you found out this abominable swindle?"

Phoebe was perfectly willing to tell him. Interpreting her long involved narrative into plain English, with the names added, these were the facts related:--Mrs. Sowler, bearing in mind some talk which had passed between them on the occasion of a supper, had called at Phoebe's lodgings on the previous day, and had tried to entrap her into communicating what she knew of Mrs. Farnaby's secrets. The trap failing, Mrs. Sowler had tried bribery next; had promised Phoebe a large sum of money, to be equally divided between them, if she would only speak; had declared that Jervy was perfectly capable of breaking his promise of marriage, and "leaving them both in the lurch, if he once got the money into his own pocket" and had thus informed Phoebe, that the conspiracy, which she supposed to have been abandoned, was really in full progress, without her knowledge. She had temporised with Mrs. Sowler, being afraid to set such a person openly at defiance; and had hurried away at once, to have an explanation with Jervy. He was reported to be "not at home." Her fruitless visit to Regina had followed--and there, so far as facts were concerned, was an end of the story.

Amelius asked her no questions, and spoke as briefly as possible when she had done. "I will go to Mrs. Farnaby this morning," was all he said.

"Would you please let me hear how it ends?" Phoebe asked.

Amelius pushed his pocket-book and pencil across the table to her, pointing to a blank leaf on which she could write her address. While she was thus employed the attentive Toff came in, and (with his eye on Phoebe) whispered in his master's ear. He had heard Sally moving about. Would it be more convenient, under the circumstances, if she had her breakfast in her own room? Toff's astonishment was a sight to see when Amelius answered,

"Certainly not. Let her breakfast here."

Phoebe rose to go. Her parting words revealed the double-sided nature that was in her; the good and evil in perpetual conflict which should be uppermost.

"Please don't mention me, sir, to Mrs. Farnaby," she said. "I don't forgive her for what she's done to me; I don't say I won't be even with her yet. But not in that way! I won't have her death laid at my door. Oh, but I know her temper--and I say it's as likely as not to kill her or drive her mad, if she isn't warned about it in time. Never mind her losing her money. If it's lost, it's lost, and she's got plenty more. She may be robbed a dozen times over for all I care. But don't let her set her heart on seeing her child, and then find it's all a swindle. I hate her; but I can't and won't, let that go on. Good-morning, sir."

Amelius was relieved by her departure. For a minute or two, he sat absently stirring his coffee, and considering how he might most safely perform the terrible duty of putting Mrs. Farnaby on her guard. Toff interrupted his meditations by preparing the table for Sally's breakfast; and, almost at the same moment, Sally herself, fresh and rosy, opened her door a little way, and looked in.

"You have had a fine long sleep," said Amelius. "Have you quite got over your walk yesterday?"

"Oh yes," she answered gaily; "I only feel my long walk now in my feet. It hurts me to put my boots on. Can you lend me a pair of slippers?"

"A pair of my slippers? Why, Sally, you would be lost in them! What's the matter with your feet?"

"They're both sore. And I think one of them has got a blister on it."

"Come in, and let's have a look at it?"

She came limping in, with her feet bare. "Don't scold me," she pleaded, "I couldn't put my stockings on again, without washing them; and they're not dry yet."

"I'll get you new stockings and slippers," said Amelius. "Which is the foot with the blister?"

"The left foot," she answered, pointing to it.

CHAPTER 5

"Let me see the blister," said Amelius.

Sally looked longingly at the fire.

"May I warm my feet first?" she asked; "they are so cold."

In those words she innocently deferred the discovery which, if it had been made at the moment, might have altered the whole after-course of events. Amelius only thought now of preventing her from catching cold. He sent Toff for a pair of the warmest socks that he possessed, and asked if he should put them on for her. She smiled, and shook her head, and put them on for herself.

When they had done laughing at the absurd appearance of the little feet in the large socks, they only drifted farther and farther away from the subject of the blistered foot. Sally remembered the terrible matron, and asked if anything had been heard of her that morning. Being told that Mrs. Payson had written, and that the doors of the institution were closed to her, she recovered her spirits, and began to wonder whether the offended authorities would let her have her clothes. Toff offered to go and make the inquiry, later in the day; suggesting the purchase of slippers and stockings, in the mean time, while Sally was having her breakfast. Amelius approved of the suggestion; and Toff set off on his errand, with one of Sally's boots for a pattern.

The morning had, by that time, advanced to ten o'clock.

Amelius stood before the fire talking, while Sally had her breakfast. Having first explained the reasons which made it impossible that she should live at the cottage in the capacity of his servant, he astonished her by announcing that he meant to undertake the superintendence of her education himself. They were to be master and pupil, while the lessons were in progress; and brother and sister at other times--and they were to see how they got on together, on this plan, without indulging in any needless anxiety about the future. Amelius believed with perfect sincerity that he had hit on the only sensible arrangement, under the circumstances; and Sally cried joyously, "Oh, how good you are to me; the happy life has come at last!" At the hour when those words passed the daughter's lips, the discovery of the conspiracy burst upon the mother in all its baseness and in all its horror.

The suspicion of her infamous employer, which had induced Mrs. Sowler to attempt to intrude herself into Phoebe's confidence, led her to make a visit of investigation at Jervy's lodgings later in the day. Informed, as Phoebe had been informed, that he was not at home, she called again some hours afterwards. By that time, the landlord had discovered that Jervy's luggage had been secretly conveyed away, and that his tenant had left him, in debt for rent of the two best rooms in the house.

No longer in any doubt of what had happened, Mrs. Sowler employed the remaining hours of the evening in making inquiries after the missing man. Not a trace of him had been discovered up to eight o'clock on the next morning.

Shortly after nine o'clock--that is to say, towards the hour at which Phoebe paid her visit to Amelius--Mrs. Sowler, resolute to know the worst, made her appearance at the apartments occupied by Mrs. Farnaby.

"I wish to speak to you," she began abruptly, "about that young man we both know of. Have you seen anything of him lately?"

Mrs. Farnaby, steadily on her guard, deferred answering the question. "Why do you want to know?" she said.

The reply was instantly ready. "Because I have reason to believe he has bolted, with your money in his pocket."

"He has done nothing of the sort," Mrs. Farnaby rejoined.

"Has he got your money?" Mrs. Sowler persisted. "Tell me the truth--and I'll do the same by you. He has cheated me. If you're cheated too, it's your own interest to lose no time in finding him. The police may catch him yet. Has he got your money?"

The woman was in earnest--in terrible earnest--her eyes and her voice both bore witness to it. She stood there, the living impersonation of those doubts and fears which Mrs. Farnaby had confessed, in writing to Amelius. Her position, at that moment, was essentially a position of command. Mrs. Farnaby felt it in spite of herself. She acknowledged that Jervy had got the money.

"Did you sent it to him, or give it to him?" Mrs. Sowler asked.

"I gave it to him."

"When?"

"Yesterday evening."

Mrs. Sowler clenched her fists, and shook them in impotent rage. "He's the biggest scoundrel living," she exclaimed furiously; "and you're the biggest fool! Put on your bonnet and come to the police. If you get your money back again before he's spent it all, don't forget it was through me."

The audacity of the woman's language roused Mrs. Farnaby. She pointed to the door. "You are an insolent creature," she said; "I have nothing more to do with you."

"You have nothing more to do with me?" Mrs. Sowler repeated. "You and the young man have settled it all between you, I suppose." She laughed scornfully. "I dare say now you expect to see him again?"

Mrs. Farnaby was irritated into answering this. "I expect to see him this morning," she said, "at ten o'clock."

"And the lost young lady with him?"

"Say nothing about my lost daughter! I won't even hear you speak of her."

Mrs. Sowler sat down. "Look at your watch," she said. "It must be nigh on ten o'clock by this time. You'll make a disturbance in the house if you try to turn me out. I mean to wait here till ten o'clock."

On the point of answering angrily, Mrs. Farnaby restrained herself. "You are trying to force a quarrel on me," she said; "you shan't spoil the happiest morning of my life. Wait here by yourself."

She opened the door that led into her bedchamber, and shut herself in. Perfectly impenetrable to any repulse that could be offered to her, Mrs. Sowler looked at the closed door with a sardonic smile, and waited.

The clock in the hall struck ten. Mrs. Farnaby returned again to the sitting-room, walked straight to the window, and looked out.

"Any sign of him?" said Mrs. Sowler.

There were no signs of him. Mrs. Farnaby drew a chair to the window, and sat down. Her hands turned icy cold. She still looked out into the street.

"I'm going to guess what's happened," Mrs. Sowler resumed. "I'm a sociable creature, you know, and I must talk about something. About the money, now? Has the young man had his travelling expenses of you? To go to foreign parts, and bring your girl back with him, eh? I expect that's how it was. You see, I know him so well. And what happened, if you please, yesterday evening? Did he tell you he'd brought her back, and got her at his own place? And did he say he wouldn't let you see her till you paid him his reward as well as his travelling expenses? And did you forget my warning to you not to trust him? I'm a good one at guessing when I try. I see you think so yourself. Any signs of him yet?"

Mrs. Farnaby looked round from the window. Her manner was completely changed; she was nervously civil to the wretch who was torturing her. "I beg your pardon, ma'am, if I have offended you," she said faintly. "I am a little upset--I am so anxious about my poor child. Perhaps you are a mother yourself? You oughtn't to frighten me; you ought to feel for me." She paused, and put her hand to her head. "He told me yesterday evening," she went on slowly and vacantly, "that my poor darling was at his lodgings; he said she was so worn out with the long journey from abroad, that she must have a night's rest before she could come to me. I asked him to tell me where he lived, and let me go to her. He said she was asleep and must not be disturbed. I promised to go in on tiptoe, and only look at her; I offered him more money, double the money to tell me where she was. He was very hard on me. He only said, wait till ten tomorrow morning--and wished me goodnight. I ran out to follow him, and fell on the stairs, and hurt myself. The people of the house were very kind to me." She turned her head back towards the window, and looked out into the street again. "I must be patient," she said; "he's only a little late."

Mrs. Sowler rose, and tapped her smartly on the shoulder. "Lies!" she burst out. "He knows no more where your daughter is than I do--and he's off with your money!"

The woman's hateful touch struck out a spark of the old fire in Mrs. Farnaby. Her natural force of character asserted itself once more. "You lie!" she rejoined. "Leave the room!"

The door was opened, while she spoke. A respectable woman-servant came in with a letter. Mrs. Farnaby took it mechanically, and looked at the address. Jervy's feigned handwriting was familiar to her. In the instant when

she recognized it, the life seemed to go out of her like an extinguished light. She stood pale and still and silent, with the unopened letter in her hand.

Watching her with malicious curiosity, Mrs. Sowler coolly possessed herself of the letter, looked at it, and recognized the writing in her turn. "Stop!" she cried, as the servant was on the point of going out. "There's no stamp on this letter. Was it brought by hand? Is the messenger waiting?"

The respectable servant showed her opinion of Mrs. Sowler plainly in her face. She replied as briefly and as ungraciously as possible:--"No."

"Man or woman?" was the next question.

"Am I to answer this person, ma'am?" said the servant, looking at Mrs. Farnaby.

"Answer me instantly," Mrs. Sowler interposed--"in Mrs. Farnaby's own interests. Don't you see she can't speak to you herself?"

"Well, then," said the servant, "it was a man."

"A man with a squint?"

"Yes."

"Which way did he go?"

"Towards the square."

Mrs. Sowler tossed the letter on the table, and hurried out of the room. The servant approached Mrs. Farnaby. "You haven't opened your letter yet, ma'am," she said.

"No," said Mrs. Farnaby vacantly, "I haven't opened it yet."

"I'm afraid it's bad news, ma'am?"

"Yes. I think it's bad news."

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No, thank you. Yes; one thing. Open my letter for me, please."

It was a strange request to make. The servant wondered, and obeyed. She was a kind-hearted woman; she really felt for the poor lady. But the familiar household devil, whose name is Curiosity, and whose opportunities are innumerable, prompted her next words when she had taken the letter out of the envelope:--"Shall I read it to you, ma'am?"

"No. Put it down on the table, please. I'll ring when I want you."

The mother was alone--alone, with her death-warrant waiting for her on the table.

The clock downstairs struck the half hour after ten. She moved, for the first time since she had received the letter. Once more she went to the window, and looked out. It was only for a moment. She turned away again, with a sudden contempt for herself. "What a fool I am!" she said--and took up the open letter.

She looked at it, and put it down again. "Why should I read it," she asked herself, "when I know what is in it, without reading?"

Some framed woodcuts from the illustrated newspapers were hung on the walls. One of them represented a scene of rescue from shipwreck. A mother embracing her daughter, saved by the lifeboat, was among the foreground groups. The print was entitled, "The Mercy of Providence." Mrs. Farnaby looked at it with a moment's steady attention. "Providence has its favourites," she said; "I am not one of them."

After thinking a little, she went into her bedroom, and took two papers out of her dressing-case. They were medical prescriptions.

She turned next to the chimneypiece. Two medicine-bottles were placed on it. She took one of them down--a bottle of the ordinary size, known among chemists as a six-ounce bottle. It contained a colourless liquid. The label stated the dose to be "two table-spoonfuls," and bore, as usual, a number corresponding with a number placed on the prescription. She took up the prescription. It was a mixture of bi-carbonate of soda and prussic acid, intended for the relief of indigestion. She looked at the date, and was at once reminded of one of the very rare occasions on which she had required the services of a medical man. There had been a serious accident at a dinner-party, given by some friends. She had eaten sparingly of a certain dish, from which some of the other guests had suffered severely. It was discovered that the food had been cooked in an old copper saucepan. In her case, the trifling result had been a disturbance of digestion, and nothing more. The doctor

had prescribed accordingly. She had taken but one dose: with her healthy constitution she despised physic. The remainder of the mixture was still in the bottle.

She considered again with herself--then went back to the chimneypiece, and took down the second bottle.

It contained a colourless liquid also; but it was only half the size of the first bottle, and not a drop had been taken. She waited, observing the difference between the two bottles with extraordinary attention. In this case also, the prescription was in her possession--but it was not the original. A line at the top stated that it was a copy made by the chemist, at the request of a customer. It bore the date of more than three years since. A morsel of paper was pinned to the prescription, containing some lines in a woman's handwriting:--"With your enviable health and strength, my dear, I should have thought you were the last person in the world to want a tonic. However, here is my prescription, if you must have it. Be very careful to take the right dose, because there's poison in it." The prescription contained three ingredients, strychnine, quinine, and nitro-hydrochloric acid; and the dose was fifteen drops in water. Mrs. Farnaby lit a match, and burnt the lines of her friend's writing. "As long ago as that," she reflected, "I thought of killing myself. Why didn't I do it?"

The paper having been destroyed, she put back the prescription for indigestion in her dressing-case; hesitated for a moment; and opened the bedroom window. It looked into a lonely little courtyard. She threw the dangerous contents of the second and smaller bottle out into the yard--and then put it back empty on the chimneypiece. After another moment of hesitation, she returned to the sitting-room, with the bottle of mixture, and the copied prescription for the tonic strychnine drops, in her hand.

She put the bottle on the table, and advanced to the fireplace to ring the bell. Warm as the room was, she began to shiver. Did the eager life in her feel the fatal purpose that she was meditating, and shrink from it? Instead of ringing the bell, she bent over the fire, trying to warm herself.

"Other women would get relief in crying," she thought. "I wish I was like other women!"

The whole sad truth about herself was in that melancholy aspiration. No relief in tears, no merciful oblivion in a fainting-fit, for her. The terrible strength of the vital organization in this woman knew no yielding to the unutterable misery that wrung her to the soul. It roused its glorious forces

to resist: it held her in a stony quiet, with a grip of iron.

She turned away from the fire wondering at herself. "What baseness is there in me that fears death? What have I got to live for now?" The open letter on the table caught her eye. "This will do it!" she said--and snatched it up, and read it at last.

"The least I can do for you is to act like a gentleman, and spare you unnecessary suspense. You will not see me this morning at ten, for the simple reason that I really don't know, and never did know, where to find your daughter. I wish I was rich enough to return the money. Not being able to do that, I will give you a word of advice instead. The next time you confide any secrets of yours to Mr. Goldenheart, take better care that no third person hears you."

She read those atrocious lines, without any visible disturbance of the dreadful composure that possessed her. Her mind made no effort to discover the person who had listened and betrayed her. To all ordinary curiosities, to all ordinary emotions, she was morally dead already.

The one thought in her was a thought that might have occurred to a man. "If I only had my hands on his throat, how I could wring the life out of him! As it is--" Instead of pursuing the reflection, she threw the letter into the fire, and rang the bell.

"Take this at once to the nearest chemist's," she said, giving the strychnine prescription to the servant; "and wait, please, and bring it back with you."

She opened her desk, when she was alone, and tore up the letters and papers in it. This done, she took her pen, and wrote a letter. It was addressed to Amelius.

When the servant entered the room again, bringing with her the prescription made up, the clock downstairs struck eleven.

CHAPTER 6

Toff returned to the cottage, with the slippers and the stockings.

"What a time you have been gone!" said Amelius.

"It is not my fault, sir," Toff explained. "The stockings I obtained without difficulty. But the nearest shoe shop in this neighbourhood sold only coarse manufactures, and all too large. I had to go to my wife, and get her to take me to the right place. See!" he exclaimed, producing a pair of quilted silk slippers with blue rosettes, "here is a design, that is really worthy of pretty feet. Try them on, Miss."

Sally's eyes sparkled at the sight of the slippers. She rose at once, and limped away to her room. Amelius, observing that she still walked in pain, called her back. "I had forgotten the blister," he said. "Before you put on the new stockings, Sally, let me see your foot." He turned to Toff. "You're always ready with everything," he went on; "I wonder whether you have got a needle and a bit of worsted thread?"

The old Frenchman answered, with an air of respectful reproach. "Knowing me, sir, as you do," he said, "could you doubt for a moment that I mend my own clothes and darn my own stockings?" He withdrew to his bedroom below, and returned with a leather roll. "When you are ready, sir?" he said, opening the roll at the table, and threading the needle, while Sally removed the sock from her left foot.

She took a chair near the window, at the suggestion of Amelius. He knelt down so as to raise her foot to his knee. "Turn a little more towards the light," he said. He took the foot in his hand, lifted it, looked at it--and suddenly let it drop back on the floor.

A cry of alarm from Sally instantly brought Toff to the window. "Oh, look!" she cried; "he's ill!" Toff lifted Amelius to a chair. "For God's sake, sir," cried the terrified old man, "what's the matter?" Amelius had turned to the strange ashy paleness which is only seen in men of his florid complexion, overwhelmed by sudden emotion. He stammered when he tried to speak. "Fetch the brandy!" said Toff, pointing to the liqueur-case on the sideboard. Sally brought it at once; the strong stimulant steadied Amelius.

"I'm sorry to have frightened you," he said faintly. "Sally!--Dear, dear little

Sally, go in, and get your things on directly. You must come out with me; I'll tell you why afterwards. My God! why didn't I find this out before?" He noticed Toff, wondering and trembling. "Good old fellow! don't alarm yourself--you shall know about it, too. Go! run! get the first cab you can find!"

Left alone for a few minutes, he had time to compose himself. He did his best to take advantage of the time; he tried to prepare his mind for the coming interview with Mrs. Farnaby. "I must be careful of what I do," he thought, conscious of the overwhelming effect of the discovery on himself; "She doesn't expect me to bring her daughter to her."

Sally returned to him, ready to go out. She seemed to be afraid of him, when he approached her, and took her hand. "Have I done anything wrong?" she asked, in her childish way. "Are you going to take me to some other Home?" The tone and look with which she put the question burst through the restraints which Amelius had imposed on himself for her sake. "My dear child!" he said, "can you bear a great surprise? I'm dying to tell you the truth--and I hardly dare do it." He took her in his arms. She trembled piteously. Instead of answering him, she reiterated her question, "Are you going to take me to some other Home?" He could endure it no longer. "This is the happiest day of your life, Sally!" he cried; "I am going to take you to your mother."

He held her close to him, and looked at her in dread of having spoken too plainly.

She slowly lifted her eyes to him in vacant fear and surprise; she burst into no expression of delight; no overwhelming emotion made her sink fainting in his arms. The sacred associations which gather round the mere name of Mother were associations unknown to her; the man who held her to him so tenderly, the hero who had pitied and saved her, was father and mother both to her simple mind. She dropped her head on his breast; her faltering voice told him that she was crying. "Will my mother take me away from you?" she asked. "Oh, do promise to bring me back with you to the cottage!"

For the moment, and the moment only, Amelius was disappointed in her. The generous sympathies in his nature guided him unerringly to the truer view. He remembered what her life had been. Inexpressible pity for her filled his heart. "Oh, my poor Sally, the time is coming when you will not think as you think now! I will do nothing to distress you. You mustn't cry--you must be happy, and loving and true to your mother." She dried her eyes, "I'll do anything you tell me," she said, "as long as you bring me back with you."

Amelius sighed, and said no more. He took her out with him gravely and silently, when the cab was announced to be ready. "Double your fare," he said, when he gave the driver his instructions, "if you get there in a quarter of an hour." It wanted twenty-five minutes to twelve when the cab left the cottage.

At that moment, the contrast of feeling between the two could hardly have been more strongly marked. In proportion as Amelius became more and more agitated, so Sally recovered the composure and confidence that she had lost. The first question she put to him related, not to her mother, but to his strange behaviour when he had knelt down to look at her foot. He answered, explaining to her briefly and plainly what his conduct meant. The description of what had passed between her mother and Amelius interested and yet perplexed her. "How can she be so fond of me, without knowing anything about me for all those years?" she asked. "Is my mother a lady? Don't tell her where you found me; she might be ashamed of me." She paused, and looked at Amelius anxiously. "Are you vexed about something? May I take hold of your hand?" Amelius gave her his hand; and Sally was satisfied.

As the cab drew up at the house, the door was opened from within. A gentleman, dressed in black, hurriedly came out; looked at Amelius; and spoke to him as he stepped from the cab to the pavement.

"I beg your pardon, sir. May I ask if you are any relative of the lady who lives in this house?"

"No relative," Amelius answered. "Only a friend, who brings good news to her."

The stranger's grave face suddenly became compassionate as well as grave. "I must speak with you before you go upstairs," he said, lowering his voice as he looked at Sally, still seated in the cab. "You will perhaps excuse the liberty I am taking, when I tell you that I am a medical man. Come into the hall for a moment--and don't bring the young lady with you."

Amelius told Sally to wait in the cab. She saw his altered looks, and entreated him not to leave her. He promised to keep the house door open so that she could see him while he was away from her, and hastened into the hall.

"I am sorry to say I have bad, very bad, news for you," the doctor began.

"Time is of serious importance--I must speak plainly. You have heard of mistakes made by taking the wrong bottle of medicine? The poor lady upstairs is, I fear, in a dying state, from an accident of that sort. Try to compose yourself. You may really be of use to me, if you are firm enough to take my place while I am away."

Amelius steadied himself instantly. "What I can do, I will do," he answered.

The doctor looked at him. "I believe you," he said. "Now listen. In this case, a dose limited to fifteen drops has been confounded with a dose of two table-spoonsful; and the drug taken by mistake is strychnine. One grain of the poison has been known to prove fatal--she has taken three. The convulsion fits have begun. Antidotes are out of the question--the poor creature can swallow nothing. I have heard of opium as a possible means of relief; and I am going to get the instrument for injecting it under the skin. Not that I have much belief in the remedy; but I must try something. Have you courage enough to hold her, if another of the convulsions comes on in my absence?"

"Will it relieve her, if I hold her?" Amelius, asked.

"Certainly."

"Then I promise to do it."

"Mind! you must do it thoroughly. There are only two women upstairs; both perfectly useless in this emergency. If she shrieks to you to be held, exert your strength--take her with a firm grasp. If you only touch her (I can't explain it, but it is so), you will make matters worse."

The servant ran downstairs, while he was speaking. "Don't leave us, sir--I'm afraid it's coming on again."

"This gentleman will help you, while I am away," said the doctor. "One word more," he went on, addressing Amelius. "In the intervals between the fits, she is perfectly conscious; able to listen, and even to speak. If she has any last wishes to communicate, make good use of the time. She may die of exhaustion, at any moment. I will be back directly."

He hurried to the door.

"Take my cab," said Amelius, "and save time."

"But the young lady--"

"Leave her to me." He opened the cab door, and gave his hand to Sally. It was done in a moment. The doctor drove off.

Amelius saw the servant waiting for them in the hall. He spoke to Sally, telling her, considerately and gently, what he had heard, before he took her into the house. "I had such good hopes for you," he said; "and it has come to this dreadful end! Have you courage to go through with it, if I take you to her bedside? You will be glad one day, my dear, to remember that you cheered your mother's last moments on earth."

Sally put her hand in his. "I will go anywhere," she said softly, "with You."

Amelius led her into the house. The servant, in pity for her youth, ventured on a word of remonstrance. "Oh, sir, you're not going to let the poor young lady see that dreadful sight upstairs!"

"You mean well," Amelius answered; "and I thank you. If you knew what I know, you would take her upstairs, too. Show the way."

Sally looked at him in silent awe as they followed the servant together. He was not like the same man. His brows were knit; his lips were fast set; he held the girl's hand in a grip that hurt her. The latent strength of will in him--that reserved resolution, so finely and firmly entwined in the natures of sensitively organized men--was rousing itself to meet the coming trial. The doctor would have doubly believed in him, if the doctor had seen him at that moment.

They reached the first-floor landing.

Before the servant could open the drawing-room door, a shriek rang frightfully through the silence of the house. The servant drew back, and crouched trembling on the upper stairs. At the same moment, the door was flung open, and another woman ran out, wild with terror. "I can't bear it!" she cried, and rushed up the stairs, blind to the presence of strangers in the panic that possessed her. Amelius entered the drawing-room, with his arm round Sally, holding her up. As he placed her in a chair, the dreadful cry was renewed. He only waited to rouse and encourage her by a word and a look--and ran into the bedroom.

For an instant, and an instant only, he stood horror-struck in the presence of the poisoned woman.

The fell action of the strychnine wrung every muscle in her with the torture of convulsion. Her hands were fast clenched; her head was bent back: her body, rigid as a bar of iron, was arched upwards from the bed, resting on the two extremities of the head and the heels: the staring eyes, the dusky face, the twisted lips, the clenched teeth, were frightful to see. He faced it. After the one instant of hesitation, he faced it.

Before she could cry out again, his hands were on her. The whole exertion of his strength was barely enough to keep the frenzied throbs of the convulsion, as it reached its climax, from throwing her off the bed. Through the worst of it, he was still equal to the trust that had been placed in him, still faithful to the work of mercy. Little by little, he felt the lessening resistance of the rigid body, as the paroxysm began to subside. He saw the ghastly stare die out of her eyes, and the twisted lips relax from their dreadful grin. The tortured body sank, and rested; the perspiration broke out on her face; her languid hands fell gently over on the bed. For a while, the heavy eyelids closed--then opened again feebly. She looked at him. "Do you know me?" he asked, bending over her. And she answered in a faint whisper, "Amelius!"

He knelt down by her, and kissed her hand. "Can you listen, if I tell you something?"

She breathed heavily; her bosom heaved under the suffocating oppression that weighed upon it. As he took her in his arms to raise her in the bed, Sally's voice reached him, in low imploring tones, from the next room. "Oh, let me come to you! I'm so frightened here by myself."

He waited, before he told her to come in, looking for a moment at the face that was resting on his breast. A gray shadow was stealing over it; a cold and clammy moisture struck a chill through him as he put his hand on her forehead. He turned towards the next room. The girl had ventured as far as the door; he beckoned to her. She came in timidly, and stood by him, and looked at her mother. Amelius signed to her to take his place. "Put your arms round her," he whispered. "Oh, Sally, tell her who you are in a kiss!" The girl's tears fell fast as she pressed her lips on her mother's cheek. The dying woman looked at her, with a glance of helpless inquiry--then looked at Amelius. The doubt in her eyes was too dreadful to be endured. Arranging the pillows so that she could keep her raised position in the bed, he signed to Sally to approach him, and removed the slipper from her left foot. As he took it off, he looked again at the bed--looked and shuddered. In a moment more, it might be too late. With his knife he ripped up the stocking, and, lifting her on the bed, put her bare foot on her mother's lap. "Your child!

your child!" he cried; "I've found your own darling! For God's sake, rouse yourself! Look!"

She heard him. She lifted her feebly declining head. She looked. She knew.

For one awful moment, the sinking vital forces rallied, and hurled back the hold of Death. Her eyes shone radiant with the divine light of maternal love; an exulting cry of rapture burst from her. Slowly, very slowly, she bent forward, until her face rested on her daughter's foot. With a faint sigh of ecstasy she kissed it. The moments passed--and the bent head was raised no more. The last beat of the heart was a beat of joy.